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ABSTRACT

In an effort to reduce attrition and save valuable educational assets, the Developmental Education Department at El Paso Community College developed two new 3-hour courses, which students can enroll in and complete at any time during the year. The two courses, College Prep Reading Development and College Prep Study Skills Development, were designed to accommodate those students who find themselves overwhelmed in courses for which they are poorly prepared. Because of simplified registration procedures, students can enroll in either or both courses mid-term without affecting their current class schedule. Students may exit the course whenever they achieve a mastery score in all 16 course modules. The modules can be approached through independent study, one-on-one tutorials, or small work groups depending upon the ability level of the student and upon available resources. Each learning module is self-contained, having its own objectives, self-paced activities, and a post-test. (RO)

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Saving Your Assets (Open-Entry/Open-Exit)

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In their well publicized national study of institutional responses to underprepared students, John and Susan Rouche writing with George Baker, found, "that institutional responses to low-achieving students in terms of development and maturity of retention programs is extremely important." They further agreed that, "the best harbingers of the future are institutional plans regarding low achievement students." (Rouche, Baker and Rouche, 1984).

The Journal of College Reading and Learning contained an article, "Success Sessions", which described an institutional program for disadvantaged students at the El Paso Community College in El Paso, Texas (EPCC). In a survey, conducted originally in 1982 and updated in 1985, nine significant student problems were identified which influence the nature and design of institutional plans to meet the needs of the college's students. These problems continue to be:

1. A Lack of Academic Skills: A vast majority of first time students continue to have inadequate prerequisites for successful college study.

2. Poor Attitude: More than one-fourth of entering students fail to see that learning is a life-long experience. They are unable to perceive the long range outcomes of their educational experience.

3. Low Aspirations: Sixty-three percent of registering students are afflicted with negative self-image, lack of self confidence and/or poor motivation.

4. Cognitive Styles: Most students are unaware of and unable to use their own learning styles to their best advantage.

5. Limited English Speaking Ability: One out of three of all students enrolled have difficulty in reading assignments and in understanding their classroom instructors.

6. Lack of College Survival Skills: Seventy percent enter college without knowing how to take notes, outline, listen, take tests, use the library, use a dictionary, follow directions, read maps, charts and graphs, skim and scan, and have received no memory training or instruction in effective communication.

7. Lack of Counseling: As a side effect of the fact that more than half of the students register by mail, many have very little information about career counseling, required employment skills, personal and social adjustments and interpersonal communications. Few ever have the opportunity to visit and speak with a counselor before starting classes.

8. Handicapped Students: An average of sixty severely handicapped students are admitted every semester. Their matriculation is characterized not only by the seven preceding factors but a few more: a lack of educational objectives, a high course repeat rate, a lack of social maturity, and an even higher attrition rate than other college students.

9. Low Income: Half of all new students come from low-income families and receive financial aid of one kind or another. Severe problems are frequently encountered with transportation needs and other school costs. Financial constraints often cause these students to miss classes because of employment, lack of child care or lack of family support. (Lazdowski, 1985).

The Developmental Education Department of the El Paso Community College continues to adhere to the traditional role of the Junior college described by Brier, "to bridge the academic preparation gap....as a formal mission of higher education." (Brier, 1984). In its unending effort to reduce attrition and thus save valuable potential educational assets, the department offered two new three-hour courses during the Fall, 1986 semester. Both courses embrace the open-entry/open-exit concept in which students may enroll in either or both courses at anytime during the year. These students may also complete these courses at any time during the school year. The two "Saving Your Assets" (SYA) courses, so aptly named by this author, are College Prep Reading Development and College Prep Study Skills Development.

The College Prep Program is one of five offerings integrated under the Developmental Education Department's "Umbrella of Services." Others include the Special Services for Disadvantaged Students (SSDS), the Basic Academic Skills (BASK) courses, Computer Assisted Instruction and a Retention Action Program, a state funded CAI program for disadvantaged students with vocational-occupational majors. The College Prep program was instituted several years ago to accommodate the veterans coming to school under the G.I. Bill. Since 1980, the program has been expanded to serve all students who have been away from school for extended periods of time. Most of the current students are mature adults changing careers, seeking retraining and those who ended their education at the high school level a number of years ago. Refresher courses are currently offered, along with tutorials in communication skills (speech), writing, mathematics, natural science, reading and study skills.

Until the SYA courses were introduced, all College Prep students registered for these classes during normal registration periods each semester. A considerable number of the more than 20,000 EPCC students enrolled each year, who could benefit from this developmental assistance do not realize that they need this help until well after they have enrolled and are attending traditional academic classes. EPCC has consistently advocated an "open-door" policy toward the entire community and welcomes all applicants without much regard to their ability levels. There is also no requirement to pretest newly enrolled students even for diagnostic purposes. About half of all students register by mail. Almost all of these mail registants experience their first taste of college academia on their first day of class. As a result of these conditions, many newly enrolled first time students find themselves submerged and over-whelmed in self-selected courses lacking the necessary requisites. A fortunate few struggle through and with great effort and pain manage to successfully complete the courses but most become so discouraged that they drop out of the courses, withdraw from school (usually within the first six weeks of class) and are never seen again.

An open-entry, open-exit plan to catch these overwhelmed students has been under consideration at EPCC for the past three years. Under the SYA concept, any student may enroll in either or both of these courses at any time of the year. Registration is quite basic and consists of a signed contract between the student and the Director for Developmental Education. This contract provides an automatic registration provision for the next college regular registration period. This allows for the three credit hours contracted for each course at the time of the open enrollment to be applied to the student's total hours at the subsequent registration period. Consequently, even a student with a maximum class credit hour load, could still enroll in either or both courses without affecting his current schedule. Only at the next registration would the three or six credit hours be included with the student's total of registered classes. Students may exit the program whenever they complete all sixteen modules and achieve a mastery score for each of the modular post tests. Those students failing to master any modular post test may retake each post test as often as necessary after appropriate practice exercises are completed. A score of 80% is required on all post tests to achieve mastery.

Modular study may be accomplished in three distinct ways or in combination of all three:

1. Working through each module as Independent Study. Post-tests are graded by a developmental education instructor (DEI) who certifies the successful completion of each module.

2. One-on One tutorial assisted instruction. Post-tests will still be graded by a DEI who will also certify the successful modular completion.

3. Small Work Groups with a DEI or Lab Assistant. Administration of Post-tests and modular completion certification will still be done by DEI's.

The method selected is dependent on the ability level of participating students as well as upon the resources available at any given time. Most students, particularly those working independently and some of those assigned to tutors set their own pace in completing each module. Completion of each full course (16 modules) may be extended through two registration periods by assigning an "I" (incomplete) grade at the end of the first grading period. Some students may complete all sixteen modules with extra effort and diligence in less than one full semester.

Close coordination between the registrar and the Director for Developmental Education is essential to the success of any program such as this. The automatic registration provision for the contracts and the administrative processing of related paperwork requires the highest level of coordination and cooperation.

A major concern raised by college administrators was that the SYA students would be lost as far as the official state census reports were concerned. This loss could result in a reduction of state funds for the college. Another concern revolved around those students receiving Veteran's Administration (VA) assistance. According to the regulations, all students receiving VA funding are required to maintain one hour per week per credit hour attendance. Administrators felt that students

working independently in SYA or even with tutors, would not be able to account for the number of hours spent working in these courses.

In the first instance, any loss of state funds resulting from SYA students enrolling after the census is recovered as a result of the automatic registration at the subsequent registration. What this actually amounts to is that some students receive developmental education assistance prior to their registration and enrollment. This situation is not new and has existed for many years at EPCC. The CAI, SSDS and Retention Action Programs have been helping students in advance of their registration since their inception. In reference to the second concern, the requirement for VA students to spend a specific amount of clock hours corresponding to course credit hours was resolved through the use of time clocks and punch cards in each of the EPCC's Study Centers. Clock hours are recorded on the time cards maintained in each student's folder.

In order to maintain the integrity of the modules, all modules are kept in the study centers and may not be checked out. The modular post tests are maintained separately and are destroyed after the grades have been recorded. Students do the modular exercises on their own note paper and are not permitted to make marks in the modules themselves. This allows the modules to be be reusable and consequently provides a monetary savings for the college.

Course Content

BASK 3023 College Prep Reading

1. Reading A Textbook (SQ3R)
2. Changing Speeds
3. Obstacles to Efficient Reading
4. Skimming and Scanning
5. Word Attack Strategies
6. Roots, Prefixes and Suffixes
7. Using the Dictionary
8. Using References
9. Literal Comprehension Strategies
10. Inferences, Connotation and Denotation
11. Following Directions, Developing Clarity
12. Higher Level Thinking Skills
13. Math Content Reading
14. Science Content Reading
15. Social Studies Content Reading
16. English Content Reading

BASK 3017 College Prep Study Skills

1. Time Management Planning
2. Scheduling Your Time
3. Time Wasters to Effective Study
4. Effective Time Management Techniques
5. Listening Strategies
6. Using a Library
7. Notetaking and Notemaking
8. Outlining and Reviewing
9. Preparation for Tests
10. Overcoming Anxieties
11. Taking Objective Tests
12. Taking Essay Tests
13. Physical Requirements for Effective Study
14. Learning Styles
15. Improving Memory
16. Developing Self-Motivation

Each modular subcourse is self contained, having its own objectives, self-paced activities, with immediate reinforcement and a modular post test. Alternate post-test and additional self-paced activities for students, failing to achieve the mastery level, have also been developed.

Plans are also under consideration to expand this open-entry, open-exit concept to other developmental courses such as mathematics, science and writing.

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